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Governance debate emerges as Winchester forms CPA committee

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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Marty Jones, left, and John Suhrbier, right, flank Michelle Bergstrom as she defends her appointment to the Winchester Committee for Community Preservation as the Housing Partnership/Affordable Housing Trust representative during the Jan. 27 Select Board meeting. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/WILL DOWD

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Just two weeks after enforcing term limits to end James "Jimmy" [illegible] two-decade tenure on the Capital Planning Committee, the Winchester

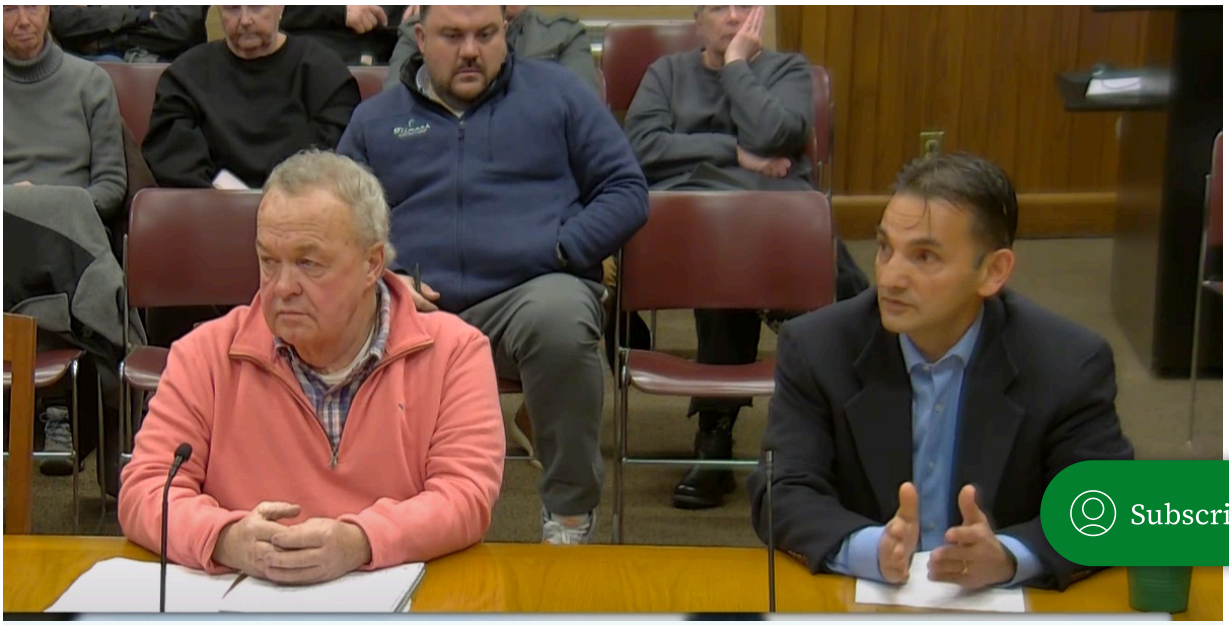
Select Board wrestled with similar questions of governance diversity Monday night while making a trio appointments to the town's new Winchester Committee for Community Preservation (WCCP).

The board ultimately appointed Michelle Bergstrom, a sitting School Committee member, as the Housing Partnership/Affordable Housing Trust representative, despite concerns about consolidating power among a small group of town leaders.

Bergstrom, who helped lead the successful campaign to adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and served on the study committee that developed the implementation framework, found her experience both supporting and complicating her appointment.

The Jan. 27 appointment highlighted an apparent tension between the board's recent push for broader civic participation and its recognition of deep institutional knowledge.

The stakes are particularly high as these appointments will help shape the implementation of Winchester's newly approved CPA, which adds a 1.5% surcharge to property bills to fund open space preservation, affordable housing, and historic preservation projects.



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Earlier in January, the Select Board voted to appoint Enzo Rascionato, right, over 20-year veteran James 'Jimmy' Johnson, left, to the Capital Planning Committee after some debate. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/WILL DOWD

Select Board member Bill McGonigle expressed concern about having multiple School Committee members on the nine-person (WCCP).

"Having two members of this nine-member committee being elected School Committee officials is a little worrisome," McGonigle said, noting another School Committee member is expected to be nominated by the Capital Planning Committee.

Bergstrom defended her ability to separate her roles, citing her experience on the Housing Partnership Board. Both the Housing Partnership Board and Affordable Housing Trust unanimously supported her appointment, with Trust Chair Marty Jones emphasizing Bergstrom's value during the WCCP's formative period.

"This committee is being formed at an interesting time in its life, because its first mission is going to be to figure out the process," Jones said. "Michelle understands a lot of town boards and processes and how the systems work in our town."

Select Board member Michael Bettencourt, acknowledging Bergstrom's integral role in bringing CPA to Winchester, noted, "She was a part of both the WCCP development process, but also the campaign for the CPA and member of the housing team that put together the section for the CPA report that we did and the study that we did ... which was very much heavy lifting and a lot of work."

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The board also appointed Jason Capodanno as the Field Manage[r] Committee representative and, in a nod toward expanding civic

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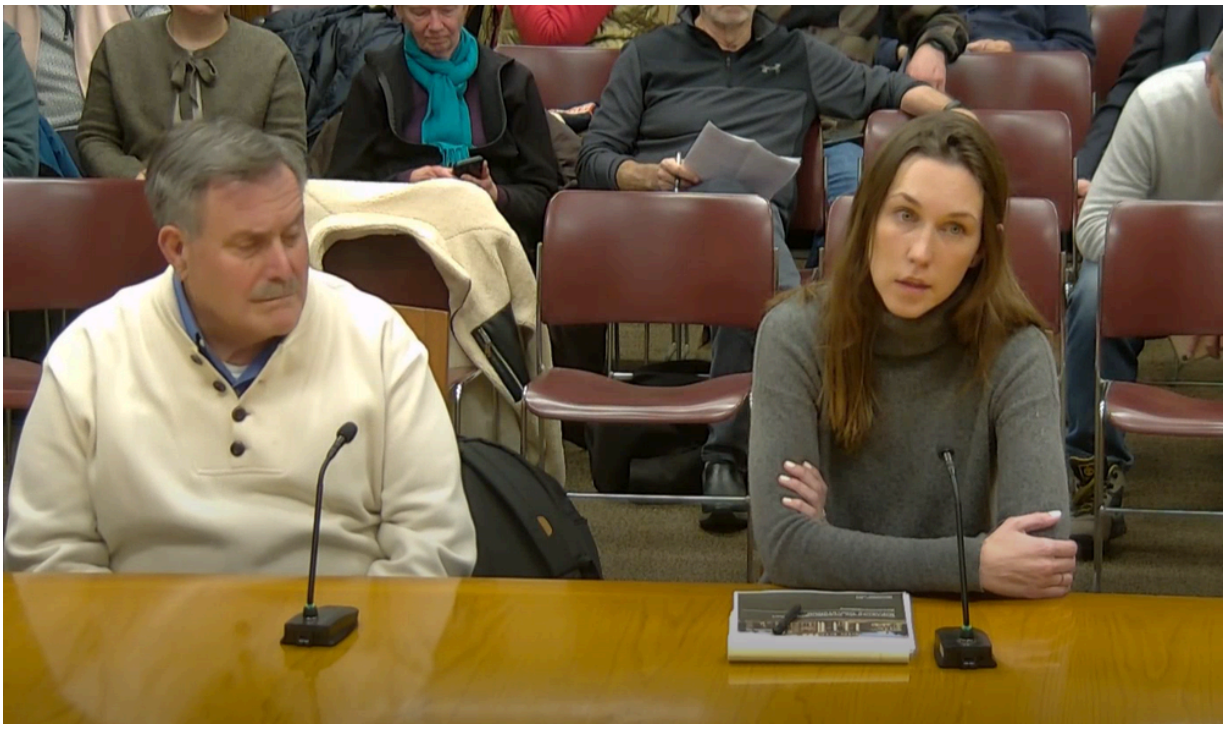
participation, selected Christina Marshall, a newer resident and municipal lawyer, as its at-large appointee over longtime resident Mark Lunardoni.

Marshall, who moved to Winchester in 2018 and whom McGonigle approached about being on the committee, emphasized her perspective as a lawyer and newer resident while highlighting her professional experience reviewing CPA proposals in other communities.

“I don’t have any particular notions as to where the money should go,” Marshall said. “I think the most important thing would be to get community input and really assign the money out in that way.”

The challenge of balancing experienced leadership with new voices echoed the recent debate over Johnson’s departure from the Capital Planning Committee.



Mark Lunardoni, left, and Christina Marshall, right, address the Winchester Select Board during interviews for the at-large position on the Winchester Committee for Community Preservation. Marshall was ultimately appointed to the role. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/WILL DOWD

Johnson served for approximately 20 years before the Select Boa
enforced its three-term limit policy, despite board members

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acknowledging his valuable experience and institutional knowledge.

Select Board member Anthea Brady suggested the appointments should prompt a broader discussion about committee structure and civic participation.

“The bylaw is not the policy,” Brady noted. “The procedures go around what the policy is, and we didn’t create the procedures. And I think that’s where we get into sort of a challenging look at how we’re appointing everybody.”

McGonigle, while praising the individual qualifications of the appointees, returned to his broader concern about governance diversity.

“All across our town government, we really have to work to get more new people involved,” he said. “It’s great that we have some select people who give us 200% of their lives … but we need to make sure we have a deep bench.”

The WCCP must have its initial procedures in place by Spring Town Meeting 2025.

The Select Board encouraged Lunardoni to consider other volunteer opportunities, noting six other town committees currently have vacant positions.

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The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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